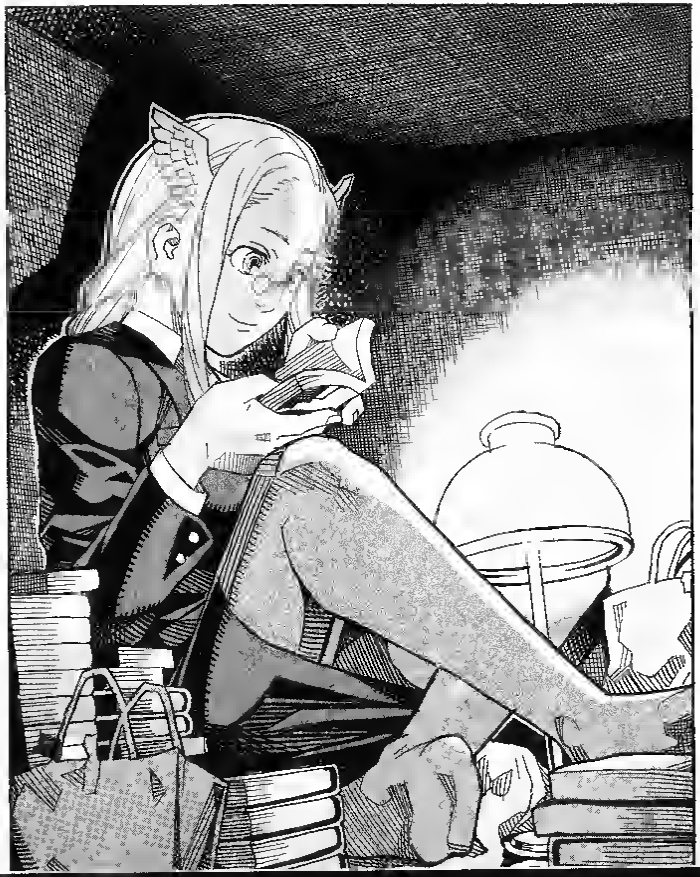
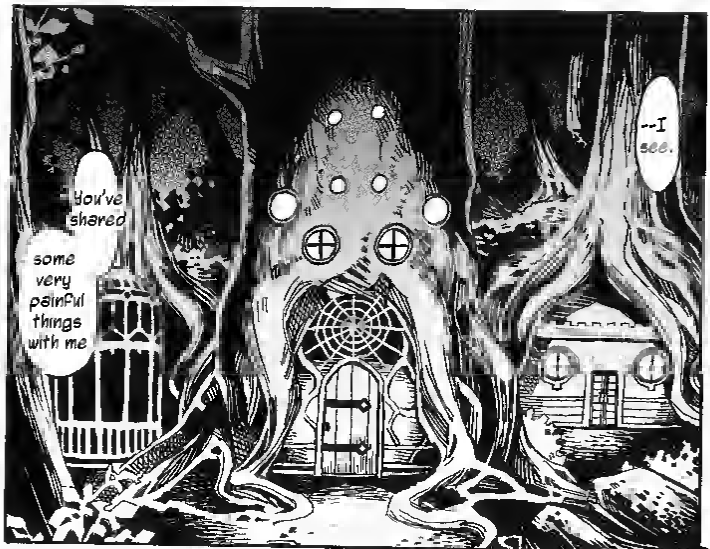


Chapter 22 — Alarum — #1


--I see.
You've shared some very painful things with me

2

Umm
--
...

I'd prefer that they didn't know about it.
Especially Merino, she might dwell on some of the things she said
--
Yes?

And so although they didn't mean any harm
Their abandonment of you resulted with Mitsuki doing those things.
I'll have to come up with a punishment for Merino and the others.

Are you sure about this, Gaur?
Yeah
You have a kind heart
We'll explain that when Mitsuki was talking about roughing you up and such, she was making things up in order to provoke you
That's what we'll tell them
3
-- What do you want Gaur
Wanting to meet all the way out here

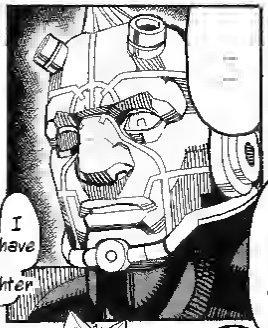
So Torque...
I hate you, you know.
-- This place...
is where I used to play a lot with my friends.
There's no place for me in Chloe's family.
I don't think that's ever going to change.
This is my favorite place. I can relax here.
Let's start from Number One--
And as for what I hate about you, I put together a list of about fifty things, so listen up.
4
You've told me six or so times already.
Interfering in my match against Mitsuki without my consent?
Yeah.
You have a long body and stubby legs like a gorilla, did I tell you that?

Say how old are you?
?
When I'm talking to you it feels like you're super old

My bad

It doesn't matter how many times I repeat myself!!
Jeez! You've already tuned out, haven't you!
Y'know
I'm willing to listen, but--

said you believed in me
--And you even


I have a daughter

Um, err-
But she's twelve years younger than you
I can't even see her at the moment

Don't tell me
you actually have a daughter around my age?
I'm sixteen, female, I.R.L.

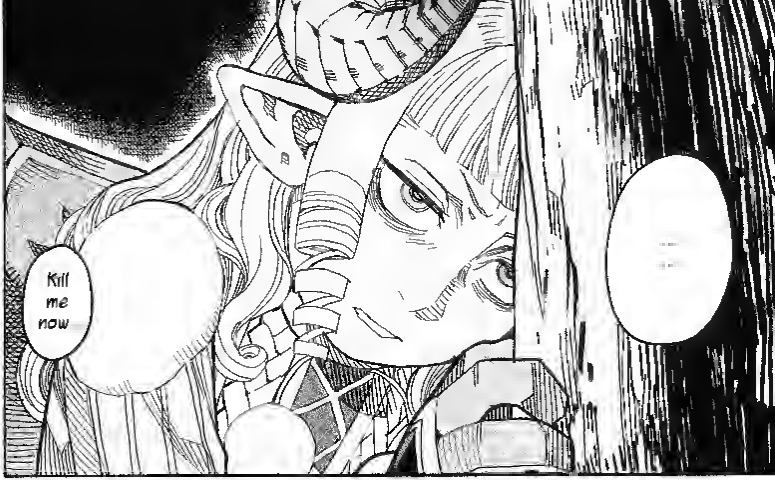
Ugh, did I accidentally step on a landmine? His tone is suuuuper dark. He must've had a divorce or something if he can't see his daughter, maybe they're on really bad terms, anyway it's probably a long story
Being connected to a 24/7 board at his age means that he's a failure without a job, so it shouldn't be a surprise that he got ditched. But I shouldn't bring that up because it'd be really rude.
(0.5 seconds)
Umm, I wanna get this across without hurting your feelings.
But you're a super dark failure of an adult!
Being your stepdam daughter is out of the question, it shouldn't be a surprise, just making it clear.
I get the impression that he's really sensitive so how do I get it across to him smartly without hurting his feelings?
What's wrong?
(0.2 seconds)
And about being a weird stepdam daughter, well, that's out of the question I want to make that clear, but
Auggghhh?!
I see
Uh! Sorry! Um!
That was an awful choice of words, even by my standards!
I didn't mean to hurt your feelings, honest!
You're strong, you're dependable, you're cool, and I even like the awkward side of you but saying this is really embarrassing-- umm, umm...

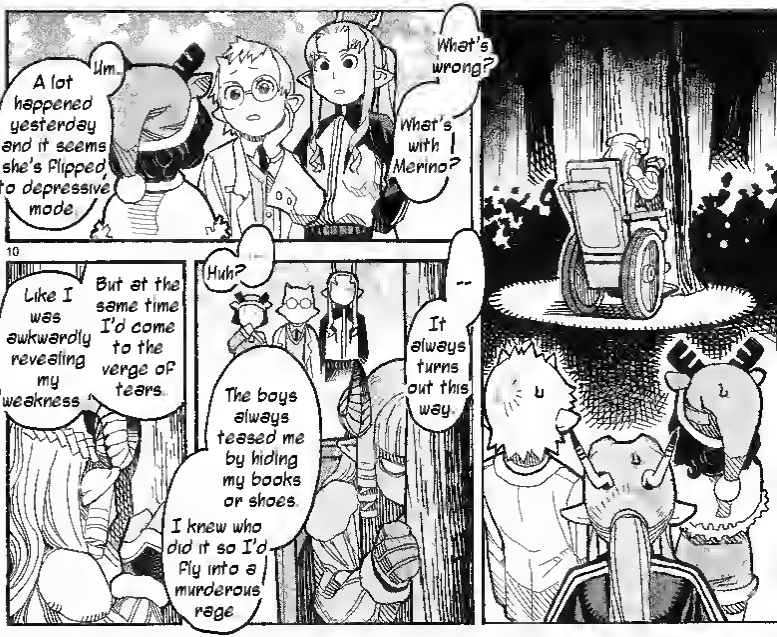
I could see
like
if you were my
Sensei, that might be okay
--What did I just say?
Nothing
Sorry, forget what I said!
I don't wanna be your daughter
That's true, it really is, but y'know
I didn't mean it!
7
--
Yeah
Going and recklessly sticking my nose in when I didn't have a chance of winning was just shameful selfishness.
It's painfully clear to me now.
--
Sen-sei?
I wanna get stronger.
So that I'm able to follow through
with whatever I've decided to do.

So...
If you're okay with it,
I'd like you to teach me how to fight...
I don't really mind
That's fine.
I guess you don't want to do it.
What's up? You went silent
No-
Ahaha haha haha!
Hoo-ray!
Hoo-ray!
I've got this recorded so there's no backing out, okay?
You've gotta train me seriously! I'm expecting nothing less!
Cuz we've established that you're my Sensei now!

She's still a kid after all
That I've seen her laughing with such abandon
Come to think of it
It's the first time, huh...
By the way
There's just one problem
Huh?...
Even if I pull my punches, the difference in our levels is too big.
If you only fight me and the computer, your development is going to be unbalanced
It'd be best if you had someone else to fight against
She's the I wanna person beat up the most right now
Then we're in luck. I have somebody in mind.

Sigh


Kill me now


Um...
A lot happened yesterday and it seems she's flipped to depressive mode.
What's wrong?
What's with Merino?
10
Like I was awkwardly revealing my weakness.
But at the same time I'd come to the verge of tears.
Huh?
The boys always teased me by hiding my books or shoes.
I knew who did it so I'd fly into a murderous rage.
--
It always turns out this way.

The truth is, I hate her! I don't care about her one whit! Do I need to write a report detailing the 500 things I hate about her in order to convince you?!
Did people get the impression that I'm obsessed with her?
Wha-wha-wha-what should I do?!
Sister Dear was the last person I wanted to show that to
More-over
11
Nuuuu-ooooo!
Miss Merino?!
?!
Calm down, Miss Merino!
I think you're worrying too much!
I'm not following you at all!
Please calm down, Miss Merino!
She's the onions stuck between my teeth after eating liver and onions!
I don't care one bit about Sister Dear, I hate her!
Wh-wh who's worried?!
In other words
bag of ce
Umm, you know
What I want right now
Is clear and decisive
Revenge.

No way!
Re-
Re-venge?!
You see there's a pattern
When I'm excited about Sister Dear
She treats me so coldly.
Dunno Er how to respond to that
And Wouldn't the usual thing be to confess?
I'm starting to pity her
So when she comes to me, full of longing, clinging to me desperately, I shall satisfy myself by treating her with indifference
What incredibly sweet revenge that would be...
12
My, my! Did she blow a fuse?
She's rather worn out, well, so don't get her worked up
Uhh,
Miss Merino Froze! She's not moving!
Huh?!
Get Gaur to notice you more
And soon you'll be all lovey-dovey!
You can do it, Miss Merino!
I think half of your dream is worthless, but I'll cheer you on for the other half!

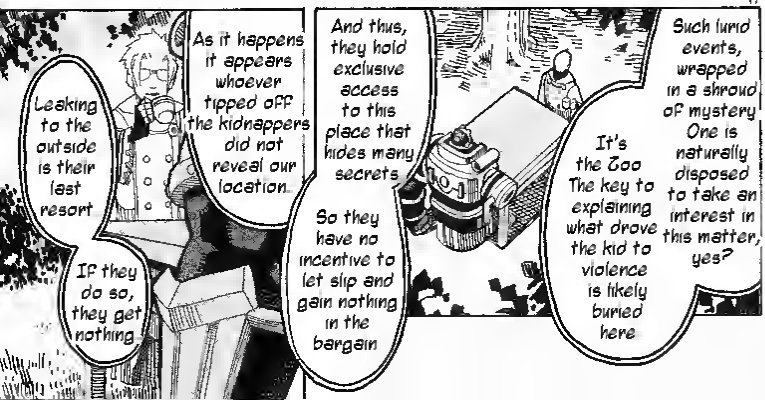
Lovey-dovey?!
Sister Dear and me
Huh?
tap tap
Hey Merino
Wanna talk to you for a sec
MGRAA-AAAAAA-AAHHHHH!
Nooo-oooo oooo
Don't come near me!
?!

--
Oof!
Hohoho hohoho hohoho
Perhaps this is an outgrowth of what I said to you the other day?
Did the thought cross your mind that you could challenge me with those amateurish skills of yours?
14
That Counts as making up?
Whew
They're making up.
Shall I call you Worthless Sister Dear from now on?
Your inept attacks are as effective as a flea's sneeze!
She does seem crazy happy though
I'll kill you
Don't get carried away, bitch
Ahh, Sister Dear
is so desperate to make me her opponent
--
What the hell
Are you talking about

Hey everyone!
Why don't we put training on hold
It's about time for lunch, isn't it?
Umm
Y'know
Hm?
Our stepfam agreement says we have breakfast and dinner together.
It doesn't say lunch, so what are you butting in here for?
Oh
Well Mommy would be very disappointed if nobody ate the lunch she made.
Since it's such a bounty of healing and status-boosting ingredients.
I never said I wouldn't eat it
Wait-
Huh?
Is this a picnic?
ごろごろ
15
With this, I might even give up going outside I.R.L.
Isn't it nice, having a picnic in the shade?
ほほほほほ
Hey Merino! Why are you eating too?!
This is all mine!
How shame-less, Useless Sister Dear!
I won't let you hog these victuals to your-self!

That may be
But what are the mercs up to?
A touching scene
Seems that things are going fairly well
--
Ahh
The purpose of the three-round match was to deflate their discontent
The unclear result, lacking a decisive outcome, was the ideal case
Not much has changed
They slouch their way around

Do you really think those guys won't betray us?
It's fine. As long as we don't kick them out without reason, there's absolutely no worry.
Is it really okay like this?
--
What do you mean?
I recall I presented you with a puzzle.
The mercs could ruin us at any moment, but why have they not done so?
It's because their objective is to remain here.


Such lurid events, wrapped in a shroud of mystery One is naturally disposed to take an interest in this matter, yes?
It's the Zoo The key to explaining what drove the kid to violence is likely buried here
And thus, they hold exclusive access to this place that hides many secrets
So they have no incentive to let slip and gain nothing in the bargain
As it happens it appears whoever tipped off the kidnappers did not reveal our location.
Leaking to the outside is their last resort
If they do so, they get nothing

However,
That only holds if we don't have an incorrigible idiot in our midst.

You mean Mitsuki
Even he wouldn't leak our location so easily, but--
There are too many scenarios where his behavior is unpredictable
It may be time to move on to the next stage of the plan.

You are undeniably a threat in their eyes
They are looking for a weakness
You and your smooth talk
As always
So if I, who am close to you, have cause to complain of being mistreated by you
They are bound to fly to my side.

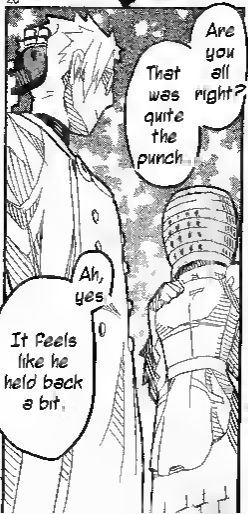
What do you mean, 'Plan'
Oh.
They sent me a message.
Just a moment
Our Mercenary Friends'?
Who did?
I've been in constant contact with them since yesterday.
I feel like we've gotten closer.

I see
Then let's make you want to punch me
Punch you?
There's no way I could just...
Even now, they may be watching
Seeing us conversing so pleasantly may put them ill at ease.
So I would like you
To punch me now, as an alibi.
--
Splendid
You've
Taken on a new disciple, have you not?
Congratulations on taking a step forward

I was certain that you were going to turn tail in fear
At the prospect of showing and receiving affection from Gaur
In the end, you are a narcissist
You're convinced you're like a clod of earth, something that doesn't receive gifts, or love
Your feelings are submerged in despair. If you don't want anything to change,
Then you'll have learned absolutely nothing since your failure

Carelessly taking further first steps forward...
If you do that--
For the second time,
You'll--

20


Are you all right?
That was quite the punch.
Ah, yes.
It feels like he held back a bit.

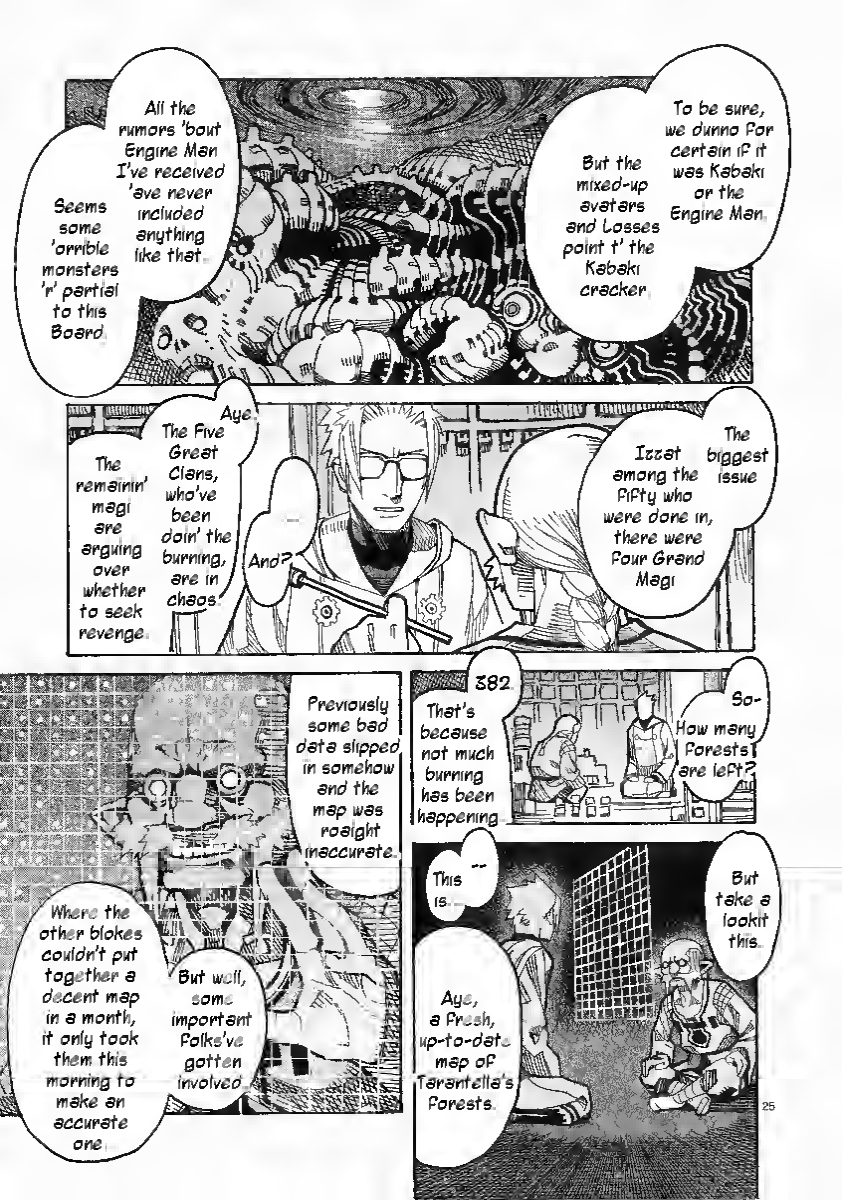
...
Hmph.

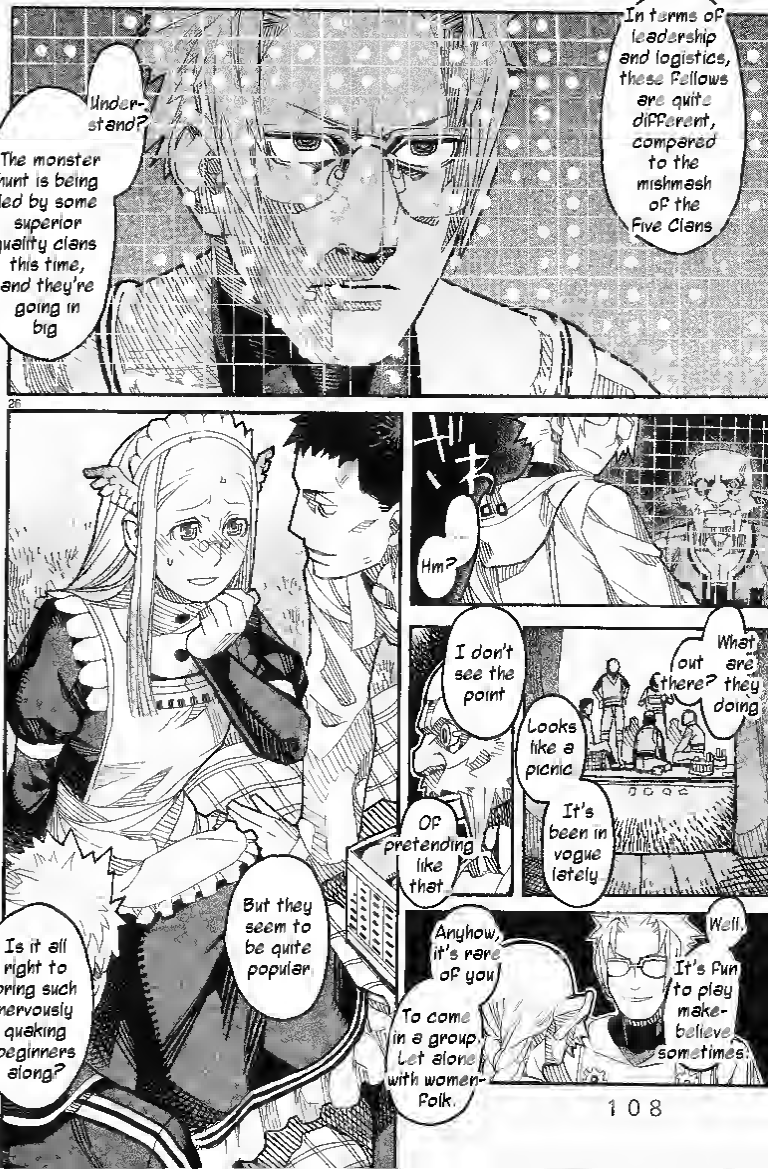
Um
So would you mind taking me along?
Huh?! Umm
I'm sorry
Oh, it's fine
Don't worry, I won't take offense
Ah yes
Setting that aside, were you serious
about going outside to do recon?
Yesterday I watched Iteka and Gaur fight, and I was really moved
I felt like I should face forward and start overcoming my insecurities
?!
But how about this?
But I think Iteka could be a good choice
You wouldn't take ol' unreliable me along
?!
!!
...
21

When push comes to shove
You're going to need fighting strength
--
I'll go too
But I don't trust you one bit
--
So you noticed
Itaka--!
Why--
Private Chat
How shameless
You know I have gaze-detection ability, yet you've been watching closely
My, my
She must feel a great sense of responsibility to watch over you
You're a thoroughly insincere man
I know you're hiding your true nature
Oh Mr Crank, you flatter me
But when you come down with bloodlust, it is not nearly as pleasant
I have no objection to being under the protection of such a beauty as yourself
ネはははは
My goodness, the plain and unassuming me will go on recon
With a beauty on each arm. How extravagant!
Nah, It's fine
I'm so sorry, Itaka
You got involved because of me
--
How did you...?!
?!
?!
Aren't you the one hiding your true self?
In truth, you love children and animals. You're a kindhearted girl, aren't you

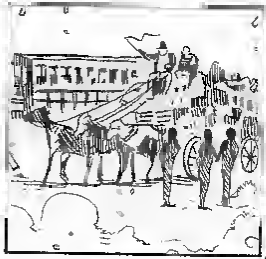
At any rate
There's no use standing around chatting, so we should depart.
Rest assured, Iteka.
That was just a random guess.
はっ
gasp
Iteka?
I had forgotten that there is someone present who is allergic to flattery
Oh, no need to worry, Sebure. It was my fault.
I said that because I think you're a cute and interesting person.
I certainly had no idea it would be on the mark
By the way, you two
About your current appearances.
It is crucial that we are not recognized as members of the Zoo while on reconnaissance.
--
Huh?
23

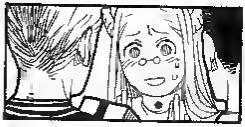
Hmm, that's right
Well
In order not to stand out
Let's just latch onto whatever Pad is going around
That obscures your identity, but the impact is rather dramatic
Not really suited for spying
24
Aye
There's a big ruckus
Mr Hoya!
Any news since yesterday?
Kebaki or summat showed up again last night
Swallowed up 'bout fifty All dead
What happened?

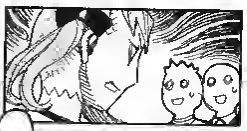

All the rumors 'bout Engine Man I've received 'ave never included anything like that.
Seems some 'orrible monsters 'r' partial to this Board.
To be sure, we dunno for certain if it was Kabaki or the Engine Man.
But the mixed-up avatars and Losses point t' the Kabaki cracker.
Aye.
The Five Great Clans, who've been doin' the burning, are in chaos.
The remainin' magi are arguing over whether to seek revenge.
And?
The biggest issue
Izzat among the fifty who were done in, there were four Grand Magi
382
That's because not much burning has been happening
So- How many Forests are left?
Previously some bad data slipped in somehow and the map was roaight inaccurate.
Where the other blokes couldn't put together a decent map in a month, it only took them this morning to make an accurate one.
But well, some important Folks've gotten involved.
This is...
But take a lookit this.
Aye, a fresh, up-to-date map of Tarantella's Forests.


In terms of leadership and logistics, these fellows are quite different, compared to the mishmash of the Five Clans
Under-stand?
The monster hunt is being led by some superior quality clans this time, and they're going in big
26
Hm?
What are they doing out there?
I don't see the point
Looks like a picnic
It's been in vogue lately
Of pretending like that
But they seem to be quite popular
Is it all right to bring such nervously quaking beginners along?
Anyhow, it's rare of you
To come in a group. Let alone with women-folk.
Well. It's fun to play make-believe sometimes.

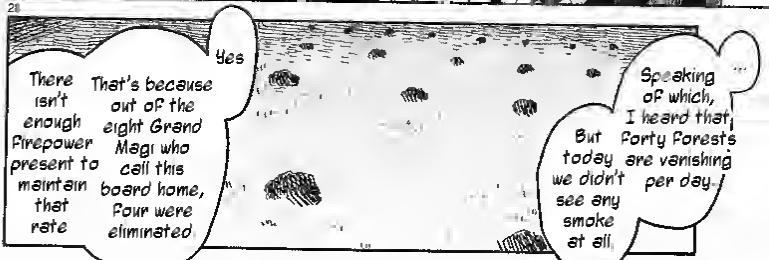
It's like they tried and just subtly missed I love it
And those outfits--, that trend was a long time ago
Oh
You are a man of good taste, Mr. Hoya
27
I convinced
Those two are quite suggestible.
What happened?
It's a light wound!
?!
Hey! Crank!
There was no intent to cause embarrassment. Rather, I wanted to see you shine.
The source anime may have flopped but I think the outfits are nice
That's no reason to shoot me
I heard what you just said! This was popular some time ago so it totally stands out! It's embarrassing!
You said these avatars wouldn't stand out!
Umm. What's what?
What's the meaning of this?! Crank, you bastard!
Itaka! Wait! Please stop! He's really going to die!
Those clothes have a spell on them. They can't be taken off for half a day.
But. What--
No, I'm very sorry, I really am
But--
Do you really want to die?
Punk







Don't get too excited, Saburo.
Those guys could be out to burn forests.
Well...
It's a matter of being approachable. Right, Iteka?
Gosh, they gave me all sorts of stuff.
Wow! I never knew there were so many nice people!

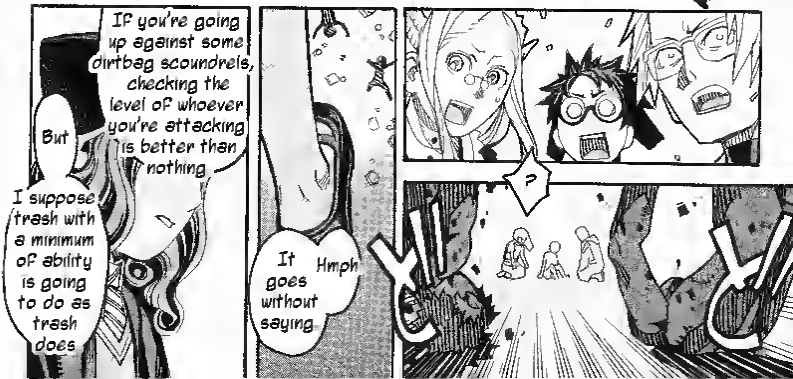

Yes
There isn't enough firepower present to maintain that rate
That's because out of the eight Grand Magi who call this board home, four were eliminated.
Speaking of which, I heard that forty forests are vanishing per day...!
But today we didn't see any smoke at all.

However, a high-level Grand Magus with Grand Magic can blow away a Forest in an instant
Presently, most of the players burning Forests have been Grand Magi
The Forests have some resistance to fire, and some regeneration capability
It takes five players about two hours to burn down one Forest
Erm. Firepower, you say...
That's what we're investigating today-- whether we're lucky or not
I did receive information earlier that was somewhat concerning
So we're lucky that half of them are gone, huh
Ah. Wait!
It's nearby
Let's go!
With luck, we might be able to see the face of a Grand Magus.
That's right.
--An explosion
Grand Magic. It seems
29

Bandits.
Or something of their ilk.
What?
Who are they?
30
Shut up.
I know you're holding back. You're hiding something.
Huh? Er.
I specialize in countering, so going up against that many opponents is...
--
Ignore the small fry!
They're in our way.
Wait!
Don't be unreasonable.
Hurry and go!
Otherwise you're looking at certain death.
Crank.
You go by yourself.

Unforgive-able! You brigands!
How dare you prey on yonder frail maidens!
--
Hmm?
31
Though
He would not appear to be a Grand Magus
That guy's A mage
--
Indeed
I'm willing to back you up, but I'm a counters guy
Dilly-dallying just means that boy will have the sense of justice killed out of him
Alas
How cruel
Well
It would appear that he came to assist frail maidenly you And now look at him
Why did he run in like that
A mage is done for at close range
And where did he come from?

You seemed a little beat up to begin with too
But why were you by yourself?
Yes. How should I put it...
Oh no Please don't worry about it
I came to help you, but instead...
I'm so sorry
I was a bit careless, and then Honey--


IF you're going up against some dirtbag scoundrels, checking the level of whoever you're attacking is better than nothing
But
I suppose trash with a minimum of ability is going to do as trash does
It goes without saying
Hmph
?

Seriously
What an idiot
That's immodest! I can see them!
See what?
Honey!
Umm, er.
Um
Your
Panties
So this is where you landed?
Oh, Lipta
Whoa!
I'm sorry I ever said we were lucky!
I'm sorry, I'm sorry!
There's no mistake
She's a Grand Magus The real deal

It's fine.
It helped that you aimed your attacks off target.
Oh, no. That's just my lack of skill.
You lent Lipta a hand, and yet I didn't even notice you standing next to him...
Ahh, My apologies...

Have you heard of the magic guild "Hog-wish"?
Speaking of our clan--!
Lack of skill? At your level?
Oh.
The truth is, I got this avatar from my brother.
I'm actually a noob. Lipta and I joined the clan to learn the ropes.
Of course.
They're the biggest magic guild around.
Umm...
Would you like to come with us?
We'd like to thank you but we'll have to go to the meeting point first.

This meeting point
It's on Terantella?
Umm..
Yes, it is.
--
What's the matter?
This may be more serious than I had anticipated.

--Honestly
Geez
They were so rude

35

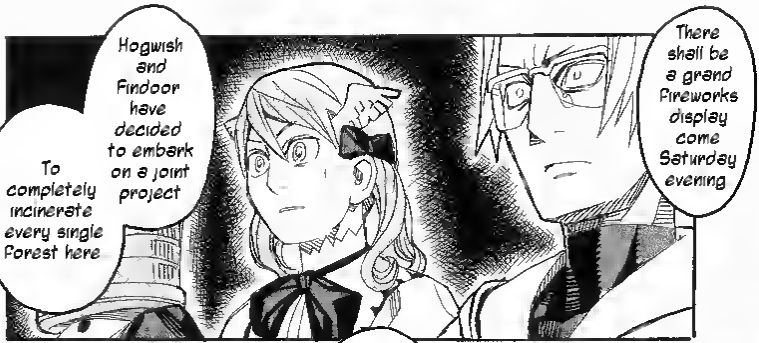
Ah.
The two of you probably get mistaken for those Zoo people if you're unlucky.
You're so pretty.
You even have wings on your head.
Um.
Umm.
You know what those ruffians said about my hat?
"You must be one of those Zoo animals."
But I just thought it was cute!
--
Hey Lipta
Ah.
Umm.
What is it?
Um.
Sorry.
Why are you always spacing out?
That's why you were too close when I used my Grand Magic Spell and blew you away.
Umm.
When you say Grand Magic...
Oh.
You probably saw it then.

I burned up an entire forest with that spell.
I was hoping to flush out those animals with the fire
But it looks like it was a wash.
36
Anyway, why do those Zoo guys hide out in a place like this. They're the worst.
Shouldn't they have acted differently after so many people died?
Couldn't they have released the details, and done what they could for the bereaved?
...!!
You put a basket on your head all of a sudden.
What's wrong?
?
Er.
This helps me calm down.
There must be some real adults in the Zoo.
Aren't they ashamed of themselves, wanting to play make-believe at their age?
But Honey
Aren't we playing make-believe right now?

We're just kids, we can play for a bit
We're fine!
I do have fun here with you, but I wondered if you thought it was embarrassing
Phew
Hey, what are you talking about?
?!
You really are stupid, aren't you?
What are you getting mad for?
?
37
Oh
Look, everyone!
We've finally made it!

--
Who are they?
--
The Findoor Knights, huh
They're a warrior guild that rivals Hogwish For size
Their internal communications, leadership capabilities, and attention to detail are respected by all
It's a sure thing that they'll be called in whenever something big is going down
But the fact that they're partnering with Hogwish...
38
Hallloo, sonny boy! So you're back!
We was worried since ya took a while!
You all right?
Didn't get waylaid by bandits and stripped of all your things?
Erm... Commander HaPwidd, umm...
Because he was with me...
Of course he was fine.

Umm...
These people just...
By the way
Who are they?
39
I give you my thanks
For coming to the aid of these inexperienced children.
--
I see
Oh
Do they stand out that much?
btw use pm
Twenty.
No, maybe even twenty-five.
Umm.
How many of those grand magi are there outside?
But Dr. Bambrogia
I was fine
Honey
You may have an impressive avatar, but for now, you are a trainee like Lipta
There will be fifty more will be gathered here on' Tarantella.
Yes--
Though on Saturday evening-- the day after tomorrow--


There shall be a grand fireworks display come Saturday evening
Hogwish and Findoor have decided to embark on a joint project
To completely incinerate every single Forest here

As thanks for today
We would like to offer you front-row seats to this spectacle